



Peer-delivered Suicide Prevention Presentation on a College Campus

Lindsey Havertape, Kim Miresse, Ashley Stewart
Dr. Jennifer J. Muehlenkamp, & Dr. Roberta Goodman



Introduction

- An increasing number of college students face significant mental health problems (ACHA, 2007), which places them at elevated risk for suicide. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for college students (AAS, 2012; CDC, 2009).
- Unfortunately, many universities and colleges lack resources to effectively manage, intervene with, and prevent suicidal behavior (Gallagher, 2007). As a result, college students are often identifying their own mental health needs and frequently turn to peers for support (Haas et al., 2003). This makes college peers an important group to target for prevention initiatives.
- The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act was passed to stimulate suicide prevention initiatives on college campuses (Goldston et al., 2010). Prior research on gatekeeper training programs (e.g., QPR) have demonstrated effectiveness in improving suicide-related knowledge, attitudes, and prevention skills over time (Indelicato et al., 2011; Thompkins, et al., 2010).
- However, a majority of the existing suicide prevention programs are not geared towards college students, nor have their effects been rigorously assessed for long-term benefits (Mann et al., 2005; Thompkins et al., 2010).
- The purpose of this study was to create, implement, and evaluate the effects of a suicide awareness/gatekeeper prevention program for students.

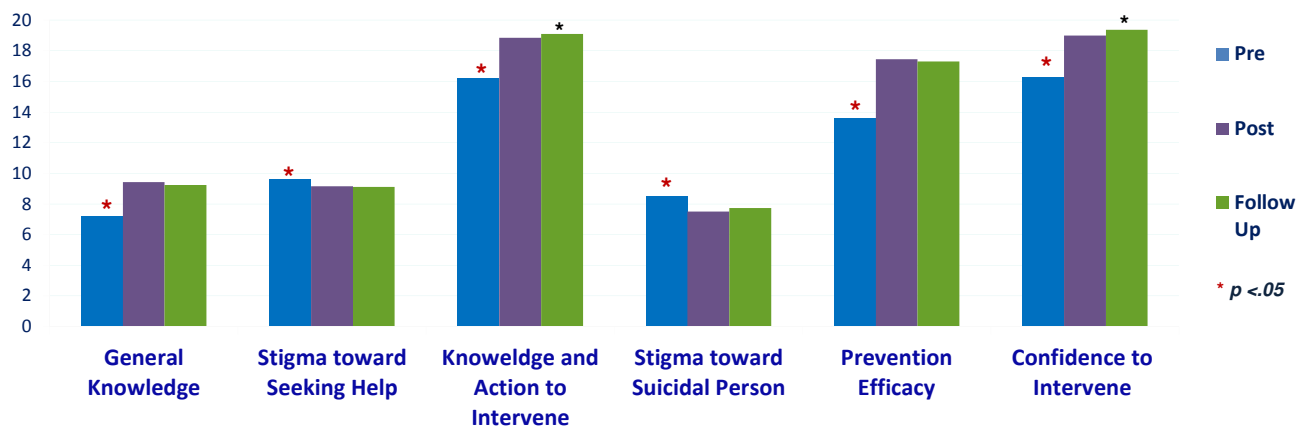
- We hypothesized that participants' knowledge of suicide/warning signs, efficacy, and confidence for preventing suicide would increase; while stigma towards help-seeking and suicidal peers would decrease. We expected improvements to be maintained at a 1-month follow up.

Methods

- The program curriculum was created in consultation with leading experts, campus counselors, and existing research.
- The program was delivered by trained college students in selected classes (e.g., nursing, social work, psychology) throughout the University. A pre-post self-report assessment was administered at the time of presentation.
- 380, predominantly Caucasian, undergraduates (Mean age = 20.85, SD = 3.06) completed the pre-post assessment.
- Students willing to be contacted for follow-up were sent an email link to the online survey, housed on a secure server. One reminder email was sent.

Results

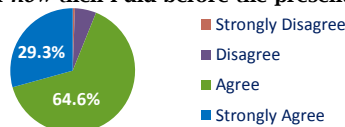
Hypotheses were tested using a repeated measures MANCOVA with gender, prior suicide prevention training, and knowing someone who struggled with suicidal thoughts as covariates. Significant effects were observed for each dependent variable.



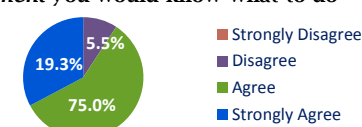
Participants (N = 294 consented) were sent the follow up assessment and 165 responded (data still in collection):

- 27.3% reported having **noticed suicidal warning signs** in someone and **asked** them about suicide in the past three months
- 7.9% reported **referring someone** who was suicidal to services in the past three months

"I feel more knowledgeable about the topic of suicide prevention *now* than I did before the presentation"



"If you were faced with someone who was suicidal at this *very moment* you would know what to do"



Discussion and Implications

- Our results demonstrate that the UWEC Suicide Prevention Program was effective in improving knowledge, attitudes towards suicidal persons and help-seeking, prevention efficacy, and confidence in one's ability to intervene with a suicidal person. These improvements held over time with knowledge of, and confidence in, how to intervene continuing to improve during the one-month follow-up.
- These significant improvements were also demonstrated among those who had received prior suicide prevention training, supporting the potential importance of "booster" training sessions.
- While actual behavioral indicators were not able to be obtained, self-reported behaviors also showed that one-month following the program sizeable portion of students reported noticing suicide warning signs and intervening in some way. Additionally, participants reported feeling more knowledgeable and able to intervene than before.
- A number of our participants reported knowing someone who had struggled with suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide which underscored the need for effective suicide awareness and prevention programs on campus. This study offers evidence that a peer-delivered program can have a positive effect on increasing factors known to influence behavioral action, and thereby possibly prevent suicide in college students.

Acknowledgements:
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